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CREATING SOCIAL VALUES IN THE TROPICS

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The constructive sociologist, he who would aid in creating social values, finds in the tropics a virgin zone for speculation and for work. Though in some areas in this region of the world society has reached a relatively high development, in others it barely exists in a form that is worthy of the name.

The social history of the tropics is unique. In successive periods of the life of man and in widely separated regions a comparatively high civilization was brought forth, flourished for a period, and fell into decay. In this connection the mind pictures Babylon, Egypt, ancient Greece, and Rome.

In the cool and calm temperate zone progress was slower, less emotional, less feverish, but the foundations of society were laid more securely and in more lasting fashion. The outcome was the gradual overcoming of the life of the tropics by the life of the temperate zone.

Strong governments of the temperate zone came to reach out to assume control of the weaker organizations of society in the tropics. For many millions of human beings life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness came to be, not a right, but a privilege which was bestowed or withheld. Property was taken, labor was enslaved, life came to be forfeited as distant masters directed.

Power emanating from the temperate zone through conquest and bloodshed, through exploitation of the fruits of labor and of the free bounties of nature, for generations and centuries has despoiled the tropics. The unnatural conflict warped and twisted human nature.

Handicapped by great heat and rain and what these produced, beset by disease in numberless forms and of universal extent, kept in poverty through oppression and exploitation, the native of the

tropics has for centuries made little headway. He has lacked that fundamental of growth as a social animal: a healthy belly well filled with that which nature intended it to hold.

In the meantime the people of the temperate zone prospered, not only by the fruits of toil in their own lands, but by the labors of fellow-men in the tropics. With material progress and a strengthening civilization and culture came altruism; lust of power and love of gold came gradually to be replaced in the minds of men by love of fellow-man and man's responsibility to man. Men went out into distant lands to carry a message of love and saving. Great religious organizations sprang up. These reached out over all the world. They spread most largely in the tropics.

For generations and centuries appeals have now been made to the spiritual. Intellect and personality have sought to win the minds and souls of the men whom that same intellect and that same personality had hindered in development both material and spiritual. What wonder that men have preached faithfully and long without really marked results! What wonder that when preaching ceased the lesson was prone to be forgotten! What wonder that the great and splendid missionary organizations of today have an overwhelming task!

The path of civilization lies through the stomach. To the native of the tropics, the message of love calling on all to cease to slay, to cease to covet neighbors' goods and women, to cease to live in the filth of the passing day, unmindful of the needs of the future, may express a hope and a longing, but it cannot express a reality while life remains a bitter struggle; while food is rare; while homes are overcrowded one-room mud hovels occupied by men and women, young and old; while the body is sick and suffering; while the mind is ignorant.

The methods of the past of attempting to create social values in the tropics through appeals to the spirit alone appear unsound and impractical. They would seem to fail to recognize the fundamental principle of evolution that concern for physical life precedes concern for spiritual life. Moreover, no organization, no matter how powerful financially, controls adequate funds to carry on constant, comprehensive religious work among the millions who are in

need of it and of such a character as to leave an extensive impression. Wonderful work has been done both by those who carry the message and by those who strive to win the heart by healing the sick and suffering, but it would seem to be wonderful as a work rather than as a harvest.

And yet all materials to make a wonderful harvest are close at hand. There has been prejudice against using these materials. It has not been thought proper by many to speak of the belly and of the spirit in one and the same breath. It has been thought even less proper to speak of the belly first and to whisper of the spirit only in later chosen moments. It would seem to presage a great day for the upbuilding of the civilization of the tropics when those who have this great work at heart will, in ever-increasing numbers, come to accept the belly route rather than the spirit route to salvation and civilization.

The materials for this great work await a bidding to be used. Millions of human beings wait to be taught how to live a life of material success; having been taught this, they may next be taught how to live a life of spiritual success. This will be relatively easy, for it will be in accord with the very nature of things. The spiritual work will appear as an acceleration of the process by which the peoples of the more favored climates and regions themselves attained spiritual maturity. Teach the benighted and belated on the road to civilization how to till the soil, harvest a crop, raise stock, collect food, build a house, gather in fruits which are the bounty of nature and care for them and garner them for times of scarcity; cure his body of manifold sicknesses against which he is helpless and which beset him in his ignorance in great numbers and with large dangers; make his body strong and give him understanding to keep it so. Let his mind feel peace, and comfort, and happiness.

Even if nothing else were done, just this alone would kindle in his mind the joy of life, and love, and good-will. Having done this, it will be possible to follow up with the spiritual message of the living God. Mental strength to profit by physical well-being may be reinforced by moral strength to covet not a neighbor's goods and belongings.

Civilized man, by introducing his mental and moral equipment into the social and economic situation of the tropics, will mold the helpless, shiftless native into a producing machine which makes far more things than it needs to live. Great social values, it is insisted, can be created in this way by approaching the problem from an economic standpoint. The striking thing about this method of attack of the problem is the fact that no inexhaustible supply of capital is required. The constant drain of missionary funds which go never to return, while carrying a spiritual message only, can be avoided; the heathen can be made to work out his destiny by means of his own brain and brawn. What he needs is direction and teaching. Done in this manner the work will be likely to be lasting; self-help will be its foundation, and self-help when once learned is as long as life itself.

Obviously, a certain danger lurks in the proposed method. What shall be the limit of production? When will production become exploitation? Restrictions must be placed on agencies which undertake such work, limiting the amount of profit to be derived to a fair business return. Any balance beyond this should be devoted to an extension of the work. The native worker must be paid a fair wage. He must be squarely and honestly treated. Christian principles must govern so that the heathen mind may unconsciously be prepared for the great spiritual truths of Christianity that are to follow.

At this moment plans are under way through which a unique organization with belief in the soundness of the principle that economic welfare must precede spiritual growth will soon start out to begin a work of Christianity and civilization in the heart of Africa. The business aspects of the undertaking have been worked out in great detail and have received the indorsement of prominent business men who have specialized along the lines of work to be taken up. If the confidence of those interested in the movement is supported by experience, it may probably safely be said that a new era will have been reached in the method of creating social values in the tropics.